



cell outlines
NOVEMBER 2019

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HOW DID GOD GUIDE THE EARLY CHURCH?

WELCOME

Don't know where we're going...

Before the session starts, set up a really hazardous obstacle course in your meeting space. You could use chairs, ropes, whatever you've got accessible. Once that's set up, add some buckets/trays/bowls of water and eggs to the course, to really up the jeopardy. Welcome the group and give them some time to catch up on each other's week. Show the group the obstacle course and ask for a couple of volunteers to attempt to navigate it. Once you've got your volunteers, blindfold them and explain that the rest of the group will attempt to guide them on their way. Take them out of the room, so they 'can't hear what's going on' (at least that's what they think). While they're outside, the rest of the group take the obstacles away – the ropes, the chairs, the water, the eggs, the whole kit and kaboodle – without letting on to the blindfolded volunteers. Bring back the first volunteer, and set them loose on the non-existent course, encouraging the group to give directions and to make as many 'ooh' and 'aaaah' sounds as they think they're getting close to the fictitious obstacles. Once they've completed 'the course' remove the blindfold and show them what they've done, before bringing the other person in to repeat the process.

Afterwards, ask the group to discuss these questions:

- 🗨 For those who were blindfolded: what was it like to be guided without knowing where you're going?
- 🗨 For the rest of the group: what was it like to guide someone – even if you were pulling their leg a bit?
- 🗨 Have you ever felt like you didn't know where you were going and had to rely on God to guide you? What was that like?
- 🗨 Can you think of any examples in the Bible where people have had to trust God in that way?

WORD

How did God guide the Early Church?

Say: The book of Acts works a bit like a 'choose your own adventure' book. Over and over again the early apostles are faced with a choice about what to do and where to go next. What we see throughout the story is a variety of ways in which God guides these leaders. This week we're going to have a look over the book as a whole to see how God guided the apostles, and next week we'll examine one particular story in more detail.

Split the young people into four groups, and give each group a different section of the book of Acts to explore. Here are the sections to give the groups and some of the stories of God's guidance that appear in each section:

- * **Acts 1-8:** Direct command from Jesus what to do (chapter 1), drawing lots to choose Judas's successor (1), giving different people different responsibilities (6), sending Peter and John to Samaria (8), Philip going to a particular place before being moved somewhere else (8)!
- * **Acts 9-14:** Saul meets Jesus on the road (9), God sends Ananias to Saul (9), visions for Peter and Cornelius (10), apostles respond to Peter's testimony and send Barnabas (11), praying and fasting in response to the Holy Spirit speaking (13), leaving in response to persecution (13 and 14).
- * **Acts 15-19:** decisions made in the council of Jerusalem (15), being stopped and moved around by the Holy Spirit (16), sent to other cities (17), given a vision to keep going (18), moving in response to needs and resources (19).
- * **Acts 20-28:** a warning not to go to Jerusalem (21), a warning to leave Jerusalem (23), being moved around by storms and shipwrecks (27).

For each instance of God guiding his followers, the group should answer these questions:

SESSION ONE

- What happens?
- How does God guide in this story?
- What impact does it have?

Give each group 15-20 minutes to go through their section before coming back together for each group to present their findings. Make a list of the stories and the ways God guides the Early Church as each group feeds back. Once you've got the full list, ask the group to try and group the different stories and acts of guidance into some general ways in which God guides the Early Church (these may include: God directly speaking, circumstances, a vision, advice from others etc). Show the group that many times the apostles trusted their instincts as well as hearing God speak; sometimes God speaks to us through our own intuition.

Once you've done this, ask the group to reflect on their own experiences: have they ever felt guided in any of these ways? Do they know other people who have been guided like this? Can they think of any other Bible stories where God guides?

WORSHIP AND WITNESS

Let's try it

Say: God doesn't just guide people in the Bible; he still guides us today. To end this session, we're going to create some space to reflect on areas where we might need guidance, and open ourselves up to God's guidance. Play some worship music and invite the group to get themselves comfortable and reflect on any areas where they may be searching for guidance. After giving them a few minutes, encourage them to get into pairs and share what they've been reflecting on and where they would like guidance. Invite them to pray for each other, that God would guide them.

To finish, remind the group of the ways in which they saw God guide the Early Church and challenge the group to be on the lookout for these things as God seeks to guide them over the next week.

THE MAN OF MACEDONIA

How might God guide us – what does it look like to trust when we don't know where we're going?

WELCOME

Macedoni-where?

This week's Bible passage focuses on a man from Macedonia, so let's start off by testing the group's knowledge of all things European. Print off a large, unmarked map of Europe (with country borders but no names) like this one: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/35/54/64/355464aad362ed7ed450396cde36c725.jpg>.

Print that out as large as possible at one end of your meeting space. Write the name of each country on Post-it Notes and lay these out by the map. Split your group into two equal teams. Explain that you're going to carry out a European knowledge relay race. When you say 'Go!', one member of team at a time runs to the map, picks up a Post-it, and places it where they think it should go on the map. If it's placed incorrectly, that Post-it is removed and that person has to run back to their team, run forward again and try another Post-it. The first team to have each of their group place two Post-it notes correctly is the winner.

WORD

A mystery adventure

Say: This story in Acts 16 sends Paul and Silas on a tour around the Mediterranean, which eventually leads them to Philippi in Macedonia, a city Paul would later famously write to. As we'll see in this story, God seems quite clearly to guide them to this city, but Paul and Silas end up in prison – was this really God's plan? And who is the mysterious 'man of Macedonia' Paul gets a vision of? What feels like quite a confusing passage, ends up with God guiding his people to bring the gospel to a new place.



As you work through this story, show the map above throughout, available from: www.bible-history.com/new-testament/pauls-second-missionary-journey.html

Read through the story below, pausing at various intervals to ask questions and discuss what the group would have done in that situation.

Acts 16:6-40 (NIV)

⁶ Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

Question: What do you think 'being kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching' meant? How do you think they knew this was the case?

⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

Question: How do you think the Spirit of Jesus stopped them? Was it a physical guard on the border? Is there a difference between the Holy Spirit in the last verse, and the Spirit of Jesus in this verse? What would it have taken to stop you from going over the border?

⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

As we read through the rest of the story, keep in mind this 'man of Macedonia' and shout out when you think you've spotted him. What do you think of Paul waking up one morning saying he's had a vision and getting everyone on their way – how would you have reacted if you were there with him?

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us.

Question: What stands out to you from this passage? The faithfulness of Paul in responding to God's guidance? The conversion of Lydia?

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.' ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, 'These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practise.'

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Over and over again in Acts, the apostles get in trouble for speaking out when it would have been easier to shut up. Can you think of other examples in Acts, or elsewhere in the Bible, when God's people get in trouble for speaking

up against wrongdoing and injustice? Are there situations in your life when you can do the same? When has fear of consequences stopped you from doing so?

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!'

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'

³¹ They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.' ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptised. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: 'Release those men.' ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, 'The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.'

³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: 'They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.'

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Questions: Do you think you've spotted the 'man from Macedonia' in this passage? Some people believe it's the jailer, who in this passage meets Jesus and is saved. How do you think Paul and Silas felt in prison? Confident and assured because they were where God told them to be? Or feeling abandoned after following God's guidance and ending up in prison? Why do you think they didn't escape when they had the chance?

Reflect back on this story as a whole: what stands out to you about God's guidance from this passage? In this story, the direction God was sending Paul and Silas seems obvious in hindsight, even if at the time it might have seemed very strange. Have you ever experienced this, when the direction God was pointing you seemed odd at the time, but clear in hindsight? Often his plans make a lot more sense later with the bigger picture that we don't have at the time. How can you keep that in mind when the world and plans around you change and seem confusing?

WORSHIP

The bigger picture

Print out the verses below, with one verse on each sheet of A4 paper. Place the verses out around the room and say: Sometimes it's hard to trust that God is in control, or that we're being guided in the right direction, so it can be helpful to remember the size and scale of God, and that he has a bigger, eternal perspective. Play some worship music in the background and encourage the group to spend some time walking around the room, reading and reflecting on each of the verses, remembering that God is in control, even when it doesn't feel like it. The verses to use (taken from *ESV*) are:

- * Isaiah 55:8-9: For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

SESSION
TWO

- * Isaiah 40:28: Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.
- * Job 26:14: Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?
- * Psalm 147:5: Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.
- * Psalm 8:3-4: When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
- * Luke 12:7: Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows.
- * Deuteronomy 10:17: For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: WORSHIP

WELCOME

What do you worship?

Before launching into this opening discussion, you may wish to play a game that the group are familiar with to kick off the session– you could even let them choose. Welcome the young people and say: this week we’re looking at the spiritual discipline of worship. As you begin, ask the group to discuss these questions:

- 🗣️ Do they think of worship as a discipline?
- 🗣️ Does it feel natural, or more like hard work?

Tell the group that we’ll think about worship in a Christian context throughout the rest of the session, but that we’re going to start by thinking about what worship means to the rest of the world. Ask the group to discuss these questions:

- 🗣️ What do you think worship looks like for your friends who aren’t Christians?
- 🗣️ What kind of things do they worship? Where and how does this worship happen?
- 🗣️ Is there anything we can learn from these ‘acts of worship’?

WORD

A life of worship

Say: We don’t often think of worship as a discipline, but when we truly grasp what worship is, then it becomes an essential discipline. Worship is much more than just singing, dancing or any other act of worship. When we worship, we remind ourselves that God is God and we are not. We remind ourselves that it is God who is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving, not us. When we worship we remind ourselves that God is in control, not us. So the discipline of worship isn’t about singing, but about submitting ourselves to God’s will, to God’s purposes and sitting humbly before God.

Today, we’re going to look at one of the one of the great worshippers in the Bible – King David. When we think about David, we think of him as one of the Bible’s great songwriters, perhaps the Matt Redman of his day. He wrote many of the Psalms. But in this passage, we look at what his worship to God looked like.

- 📖 Read 2 Samuel 6 (NIV), however works best for your group. You could take it in turns to read verses, or have one person read it.

¹David again brought together all the able young men of Israel – thirty thousand. ²He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark. ³They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart ⁴with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. ⁵David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.

⁶When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. ⁷The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God.

⁸Then David was angry because the Lord’s wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.

⁹David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, ‘How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?’

SESSION
THREE

¹⁰ He was not willing to take the ark of the Lord to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. ¹¹ The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the Lord blessed him and his entire household.

¹² Now King David was told, 'The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God.' So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. ¹³ When those who were carrying the ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. ¹⁴ Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, ¹⁵ while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

¹⁶ As the ark of the Lord was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷ They brought the ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord. ¹⁸ After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty. ¹⁹ Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

²⁰ When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, 'How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!'

²¹ David said to Michal, 'It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel – I will celebrate before the Lord. ²² I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour.'

²³ And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

Ask the group to share their immediate reactions to what David does in this passage. Would they be comfortable worshipping like that?

We're going to pull out three key verses from this passage and reflect on what that could mean for our lives of worship.

v14: Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might

David's worship was **total**. He worshipped God 'with all his might'. Despite being the king of Israel, he gave everything in worship. Encourage the group to talk in pairs about what total worship in their lives would look like. What would it mean to give your all to God in worship?

v20: When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, 'How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!'

David **didn't care what people thought** when he worshipped. So often, we fail to put God first, we hold back in fully worshipping God because we're scared of what others think. This wasn't the way David approached worship. Ask the group: have you ever held back in any kind of worship because you're scared of what others think? What would help you with this? What would it look like for you not to be held back by this?

v21: David said to Michal, 'It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel – I will celebrate before the Lord.'

David's worship was about one thing: God. The reason he doesn't care what people think, the reason he gives his all, is because worship isn't about himself, it isn't about what he looks like; it's only about God. Ask the group to spend some time honestly reflecting on this question by themselves: is their worship always about God or is it sometimes about themselves? What does worship about ourselves look like and how can we avoid it? Once they've reflected on this, invite them to share their thoughts in pairs.

WORSHIP

Your turn

Normally at this part of the session, we'd give the young people an activity to help them worship. But after spending this session exploring worship, it's time to hand it over to them. Explain this idea to the group and then invite them to come up with a way of worshipping together using whatever they have on them, or in the room. They could play a song from their phone, sing together, read some Scripture – whatever they choose to come up with...

WITNESS

How can you worship this week?

After worshipping together, invite the group to reflect on a normal week and ask themselves the question: where is there room for worship in my week? What 'everyday' activities can I make worshipful this week? Would I need to change anything to do this? Ask the group to put some reminders on their phone to make this change in the next week and ask them to keep track so they can share their experiences with the rest of the group next time you meet together.

ACTS INTO ACTION: WHERE MIGHT GOD BE CALLING US?

Our passages in Acts this month focused on how God guided the Early Church, and the impact that following God's will had on his followers and the people they came into contact with. God's will isn't just about us having a nice life. Instead, searching for God's guidance is about inviting him to influence those around us through the way we live our lives. So what does this look like for us? How are we seeking God's will to impact those around us?

When we look at the book of Acts, we see God guide people in a number of ways, but today we're going to focus on three of these: by speaking directly, through circumstances and through the needs of the people they were ministering to. And then, after hearing God, they responded to him. Hearing God would have been utterly worthless if it hadn't impacted their decision making.

For this session, spend some time on those three areas before bringing it all together and reflecting on how this might lead your group to move forwards.

Circumstances

The group could reflect on people they've bumped into or other such circumstances recently. What might God's invitation be in these circumstances? What else has been going on?

The needs

Spend a chunk of time looking at the needs of those in the community around your group. What are the needs of that community? You could find a community profile or other research which highlights those needs and spend some time discussing those. You could bring in those who work in the community in various areas to share their experiences and encourage the group to get involved in any work going on. Make this section bespoke to your context. What work is already going on that you could get involved with? Where is God already on the move? What are the young people already involved with or passionate about?

Hearing from God

After you've spent some time reflecting on these two areas, spend some time bringing those things to God and asking what God might be saying about those things. Where might God be prompting you? What needs is God aware of that you haven't talked about?

Bring these areas together and draw out some conclusions about what God might be inviting your group into, and then spend some time coming up with ideas about how you might respond to this and start bringing Jesus to the community around you.